

The President's Daily Brief

3 February 1973

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

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PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Despite a general lull in military activity in South Vietnam, there are tenuous signs that the Communists may undertake new military action in some areas just prior to the arrival of international observer teams. (Page 1)

Government and Pathet Lao negotiators continued their discussions of arrangements for a cease-fire and formation of a new coalition government yesterday at the second session of their private talks. (Page 2)

Soviet officials recently have taken the unusual step of openly acknowledging China's developing strategic nuclear capability against the USSR. (Page 3)

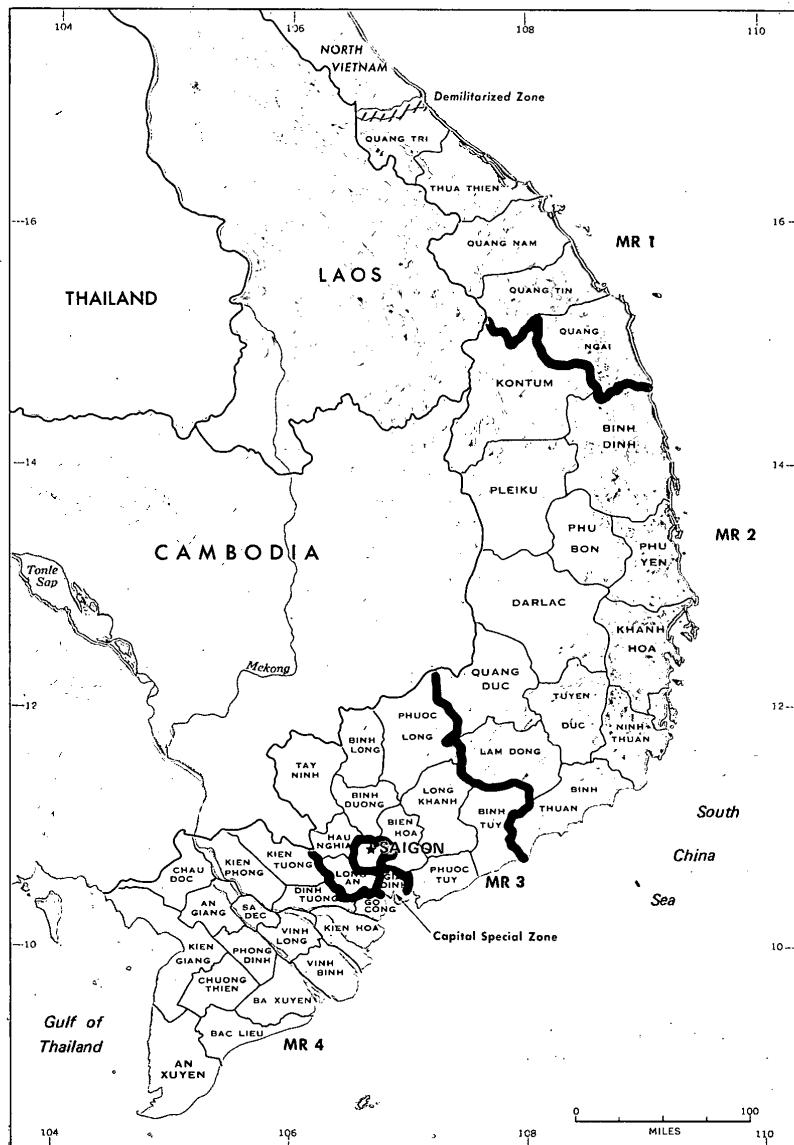
The Soviet Union's top agricultural administrator, who was demoted yesterday from the post of First Deputy Premier, is an obvious scapegoat for the country's continuing harvest difficulties. Soviet winter grain crop losses may equal or even exceed those of last year. (Page 4)

Pakistan believes it can do nothing toward breaking the impasse with India until there is progress on the repatriation of the 90,000 prisoners of war held there. (Page 5)

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SOUTH VIETNAM

There is a general lull in military activity throughout most of the country for the first time since the cease-fire went into effect. Sporadic fighting persists in some areas, most of it caused by the government's continued efforts to clear roads and drive North Vietnamese from hamlets occupied just before the cease-fire.

Despite the marked reduction in military activity, there are tenuous signs that the Communists may undertake new military action in some areas just prior to the arrival of international observer teams.

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The Communists may wish to make one more effort to take additional territory. This could explain why the bulk of North Vietnamese main force units, although well-positioned, were not committed in the last round of attacks before the cease-fire.

At least two instances have been reported of friendly meetings of South and North Vietnamese main force units during flag raising ceremonies in Kontum Province. Apparently no shots were fired and, in both cases, the two sides agreed on a division of territorial control.

In the delta province of Bac Lieu, the Viet Cong are reported to have requested a cease-fire from the local South Vietnamese artillery commander, and the latter stopped the firing.

* * *

Peking has given a very warm reception to negotiator Le Duc Tho and Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh and, in the process, further underscored its strong support for the Vietnam agreement. Mao himself received the Vietnamese visitors in a "cordial" atmosphere on 1 February. The following day, the Chinese turned out about half the Politburo and more than 10,000 persons at a rally in Peking to celebrate the accords.

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LAOS

Government and Pathet Lao negotiators continued their discussions of arrangements for a cease-fire and formation of a new coalition government yesterday at the second session of their private talks.

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On the military front, communications intelligence confirms that the North Vietnamese have abandoned their siege of Bouam Long, the government stronghold north of the Plaine des Jarres, apparently in large part because of B-52 strikes. Major combat elements that had participated in the fighting have moved back toward the Plaine. At the same time, other intercepted messages indicate that North Vietnamese units are completing preparations for an effort to recapture Muong Phalane in the central panhandle.

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USSR-CHINA

On two occasions recently, Soviet officials have openly acknowledged China's developing strategic nuclear capability against the USSR. In December an official of the Soviet UN delegation, in a talk with US officials, raised the issue of China's relationship to SALT and the need to take China into account in agreements on future strategic force levels. He noted that the USSR had a special problem: Chinese nuclear weapons systems that could strike the USSR but not the US, and thus would not be considered strategic in US-Soviet terms. The official concluded that the "splendid superiority" needed to retain a nearly complete Soviet pre-emptive or disarming capability against China was rapidly going or gone already.

The same basic points were made by a public lecturer in Leningrad on 21 January. The lecturer asserted that China has developed a "second-strike" capability against the USSR and that by relocating "ICBMs" in silos farther away from the Soviet border, Peking has eliminated the threat of "surgical" air or land attacks on its missiles.

These open acknowledgments of Chinese capabilities against the USSR are unusual. We have seen no sudden change in Chinese strategic strike capabilities that would alarm the Soviets.

Moscow encouraged rumors of a possible "surgical" strike following the fighting along the Sino-Soviet border in 1969 in order to apply political pressure on Peking, but whether the Soviets considered it a practical policy option is unknown. In light of continued Chinese charges of Soviet aggressiveness at the UN and elsewhere, Moscow may believe that the time has come to lay the issue to rest.

Lack of Snow Endangers Soviet Winter Grain



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Snow Depth

- 0-2 inches
- 2-4 inches
- Over 4 inches

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USSR

Dmitry Polyansky, demoted yesterday from USSR First Deputy Premier to Minister of Agriculture, is an obvious scapegoat for the country's continuing harvest difficulties. He has been the Soviet Union's top agricultural administrator since 1962. It is likely, however, that the broader scale of Kremlin politics is equally important in causing his fall.

Following Khrushchev's ouster, Polyansky was an important member of the Ukrainian "clique" surrounding Brezhnev. As Brezhnev has moved in the past two years into a position of greater dominance in the leadership, he has espoused the twin programs of detente abroad and consumer interests at home--moves that opened a gap between him and his relatively conservative Ukrainian allies. Polyansky's demotion is the second blow to this Ukrainian group in the Politburo since last May.

* * *

Observations of a US Embassy agricultural officer suggest that the winter grain crop losses will equal or even exceed those of last year, when only 23 million hectares were harvested, compared to a normal average of 31 million.

The officer, who recently traveled by train through some of the major winter grain areas, reports that snow cover was no more than two inches over the entire route. Fellow passengers told him that there would normally be over 20 inches of snow at this time of the year. Soviet weather maps indicate that the same general weather conditions--little snow combined with extreme cold--prevail throughout most of the major winter grain areas.

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INDIA-PAKISTAN

Aziz Ahmed, secretary-general of the Pakistani Foreign Ministry, has reiterated that Pakistan believes it can do nothing toward breaking the impasse with India until there is progress on the repatriation of the 90,000 prisoners of war held there. Neither can there be recognition of Bangladesh until the prisoners are returned, Ahmed told the US chargé. He chiefly blamed India and Bangladesh for the impasse but also blamed third countries, including the US, for not using their leverage in Dacca and New Delhi.

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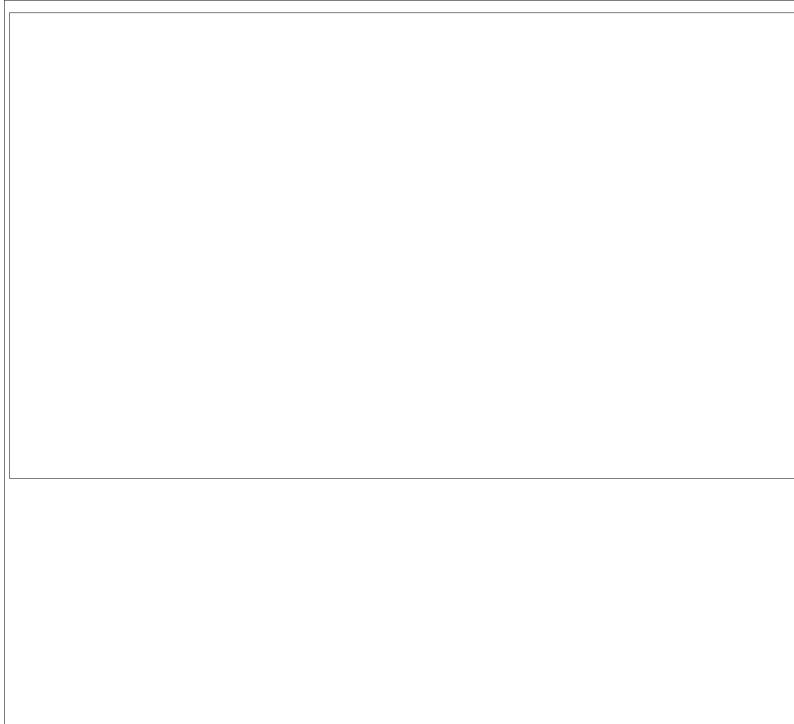
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Bhutto has continued to speak publicly of the need for eventual recognition of Bangladesh, but has stated no action can be taken at least until after elections in early March.

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EGYPT



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